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ABSTRACT

This curriculum guide for public fire educators was developed to assist them in planning and implementing fire educational programs for older Americans (over 65), adults, youthful firesetters, and children. This booklet's content is in four parts: (1) Over 65 and Fire Safety discusses five broad questions which provide the framework for planning programs: Who are the older Americans? What do older people need to know about fire? What does the fire education planner need to understand about older people? What can be done to interest older people in fire safety? and What existing means of communicating can be used to reach the older people?; (2) Adults Are the Key covers three basic principles for communicating fire safety to adults: Tell them the facts about fire hazards; appeal to their basic concerns; and be specific about hazards and appropriate behavior; (3) Youthful Firesetting Behavior discusses how one might spot a potential firesetter, makes distinctions as to the severity of different acts of firesetting, provides suggestions for methods of treatment, and presents eight common myths about firesetters; and (4) Growing Up Carefully takes a developmental approach to fire education for children at different stages of their growth and includes specific program ideas for each age group. (EM)

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ED142827

# Fire Education Planning

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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CE 012 153

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

NATIONAL FIRE PREVENTION AND CONTROL ADMINISTRATION

Public Education Office

May 1977

## Pamphlet Abstract


The purpose of this pamphlet is to provide useful information to people who are planning fire education programs for people over 65. It focuses on five broad questions which, when answered, provide the framework for planning successful programs:

(1) WHO ARE THE OLDER AMERICANS? People over 65 come from a variety of backgrounds and live in many different situations.

(2) WHAT DO OLDER PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FIRE? Everyone needs to know something about fire. The activities of older people clearly point to specific pieces of information which *they* need to know.

(3) WHAT DOES THE FIRE EDUCATION PLANNER NEED TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT OLDER PEOPLE? Certain characteristics seem to be common to older people who experience fires. Some of these common elements must be taken into consideration in planning fire education programs.

## INTRODUCTION

Some segments of our population are more susceptible than others to fire injury and death. Children may harm themselves due to a lack of knowledge or ability to react to a fire situation. Youthful firesetters yield to peer group pressure, desire attention, or vent frustrations and hostilities through firesetting. Older Americans confront special hazards, such as alcohol and smoking, with a possibly diminished capability to respond to danger. Adults hold the key to fire safety education.

Reaching these four groups with effective public fire education messages is a challenge shared by public fire educators nationwide. To assist fire educators in planning and implementing education programs for the young, for youthful firesetters, for older Americans, and for adults the Public Education Office of the National Fire Prevention and Control Administration has published this four-part booklet. Developed to accompany four "blueprints for planning" for these four target audiences, this booklet provides insights into the living patterns, specific hazards, and motivation of these groups.

We hope this information is helpful in planning local public fire education programs. The Public Education Office invites user comments and welcomes learning about local education programs based on this information on children, youthful firesetters, the elderly, and adults.

Richard Strother
Associate Administrator

(4) WHAT CAN BE DONE TO INTEREST OLDER PEOPLE IN FIRE SAFETY? Contrary to what many think, older people are receptive to new information. However, it is important to keep several key principles in mind when communicating new ideas to this age group.

(5) WHAT EXISTING MEANS OF COMMUNICATING CAN BE USED TO REACH THE OLDER PEOPLE? It is possible to use existing channels of communication to reach older people by learning who they talk to, where they go, and what media they listen to, read, and watch.

## Who Are the Older Americans?

There are 20,000,000 people in the United States over the age of 65, a number equal to the entire population of the state of California. Since most of these people were born near the turn of the century, it is not surprising to learn that half of them were *not* born in the United States.

Nor are they, as a group, highly educated. No more than half have completed elementary school. A mere 6% are college graduates. Nearly one and a half million are functionally illiterate.

On the other hand, 90% are registered to vote and 2/3 vote regularly. In short, Americans over 65 years of age are the same people they used to be, only older, and often poorer.

Most older people (60%) live in cities, 35% live in small rural towns, and 5% live on farms. Most (66%) own their own homes, though many of these dwellings have fallen into disrepair.

The one-third who are not home-owners live in retirement villages, rented tenements, retirement hotels, or public housing, many of which are often badly in need of repair.

*Seven out of ten older people live below the poverty level.* More than 25% of people over 65 have annual incomes of less than $1852. Even more striking is the fact that nearly half (47%)

## If You Don't Read Anything Else, Read This!

**Older people are just like everyone else—only older and generally poorer.**

**Don't keep telling old people they are old. No one wants to be reminded of things they don't like and can't do anything about.**

**Don't necessarily expect older people to be able to afford detection systems, escape ladders, and fire extinguishers. Organize cooperatives to buy these things wholesale.**

**Plan fire education meetings for daytimes when the weather is good. No one likes to go out at night, particularly in bad weather.**

**Older people are looking for things to do. Structure a program which has specific tasks to be done, such as designing posters, writing fire education slogans, contacting other people, or holding bake sales to raise money. Pay *them* for their work if any money is available.**

**When designing written materials, use BIG PRINT and bright, contrasting colors. When using TV, run large-print captions across the bottom of the screen.**

**Have older people practice emergency escape plans, relighting a pilot, and other safety measures. *Remember* that people retain information best if they have a chance to see something demonstrated and to practice it.**

**Smoking is the number one cause of fire and burn injuries among older people. Giving it up is one solution. Using big ashtrays, wearing flame-retardant bathrobes and nightgowns, not smoking in bed, and not smoking *while* drinking or medicated are other ways to minimize the risk.**

**If you find that you are intolerant of older people, just remind yourself that if you're lucky, you may live to be very old. There are 106,000 people in the United States over the age of 100.**

of all older black women live on yearly incomes of less than $1000.

Even though 14% of the population continues to work after retirement, their jobs are, on the whole, low-paying. For most people, retirement means a severe drop in income at a time in their lives when "cutting back" is not really feasible.

In spite of these tremendous economic impediments, four-fifths of the older population are fully mobile, with only 5% living in institutions at any one time. (Over their lifetime, however, one-fourth can expect to spend some time in a nursing home.) Two-thirds of those who are not institutionalized live in family situations, either as heads of households, or with relatives. On the whole, more older men than women live with relatives. A remarkable *20% of women over 65 live alone, while only 6% of the men over 65 do.*

Given these statistics regarding income and housing, it is no wonder that older people, nearly 90% of whom suffer from chronic health problems, die in fires at more than twice the rate of people 20 years younger. Even so, they start few fires in proportion to the rest of the population.

## What Do They Need to Know about Fire?

IT IS ALWAYS IMPORTANT TO GIVE PEOPLE THE INFORMATION THEY NEED WHEN THEY NEED IT.

People need different kinds of fire safety information depending on where they live, what they do, and how old they are. It is as meaningless to tell an older person not to chew on electrical cords as it is to tell a baby about the proper storage of flammable liquids.

A group of enabling factors have been identified as the primary ingredients which can result in older people being seriously injured or killed by fire.

(1) Older people are most frequently involved in fires between 7 and 10 A.M. Experts believe this is due to the fact that older people tend to be groggy when they rise and become increasingly

alert as the day goes on. Early morning fire and burn accidents can be minimized by purchasing flame-retardant sleepwear, not smoking in the early morning, being sure to turn off the gas between the first and second matches, and avoiding hazardous tasks until later in the day.

(2) Smoking is the number one cause of fire and burn deaths among older people. Specifically, the highest risk situation is one which can be called the "fatal triangle." The triangle is comprised of a *cigarette* smoked in an *overstuffed chair* by a person who is either tired or under *stress* and/or under the influence of *alcohol* or *drugs*. Like the fire triangle, if one of these elements can be removed, the risk is drastically reduced.

(3) Young people are advised to stop, drop, and roll if their clothes catch fire. Older people, for whom falls are an even greater hazard than fire, may find that this advice creates more problems than it solves. They should learn to quickly remove burning clothing.

(4) Prevention of clothing ignition is of prime importance. Older people should select flame retardant (FR) clothing whenever possible. When purchasing non-FR garments, they need to know that some fibers such as wool, modacrylic, polyester or nylon are generally more difficult to ignite and burn more slowly than most untreated cottons and polyester/cotton blends. Also, older people should be reminded that when they are cooking, loose fitting clothing such as bathrobes with wide sleeves can be hazardous.

(5) Due to chronic health problems older people are more likely to succumb to smoke inhalation than younger people and may not be physically able to escape via some routes. For example, it is virtually impossible for most eighty-year olds to run down fire stairs and climb out windows without suffering physical injury. Older people should be aware of their vulnerability and should:

(a) know and practice escape routes; and
(b) know how to minimize the amount of smoke inhaled by staying low, placing a wet cloth over their nose and mouth, and stuffing a rag or towel under a door while waiting for help.

(6) Many people find themselves living alone for the first time in old age. This is especially true of women who, because of longer life expectancy and a tendency to marry men who are older than they, are often left alone or in unfamiliar surroundings late in life. Almost all older people lose someone whom they have depended on, whether for company, meals, or small household repairs and errands. These people have to deal with a sense of loss and grief *and* learn new skills at the same time. Fire safety information should therefore include household "hints" such as the proper lighting of pilot lights, how to check and change fuses, how to use and maintain heating units, and how to call the fire department for information and help.

(7) People over 65 should have a yearly physical check-up. Failing vision, difficulty with stairs, diminishing reach, dizziness, and other effects of illness have serious implications for fire safety. People have to know and understand their physical condition in order to make good choices.

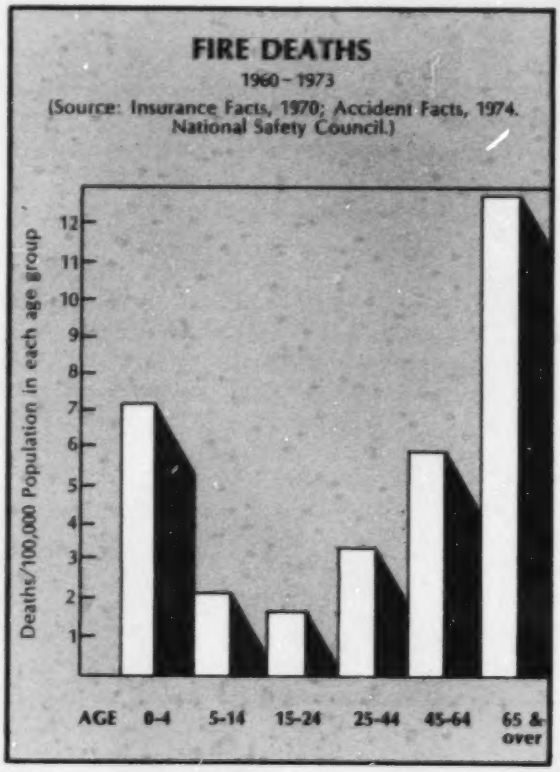
(8) When a fire ignites, it is *essential* to have a pre-practiced plan of action.

## What Do You Need to Know about Them?

For many of us, the only people over 65 we know are our parents or grandparents. We tend to think of them in these structured family roles and don't focus on them as individuals with unique strengths and weaknesses. Because of our emotional attachments, we fail to see them as "real human beings." In order to teach fire safety, we must understand their needs and desires.

Few things are as important to the older person as the desire to remain independent. Always appeal to their healthy interest in continuing to take care of themselves. In other words, fire safety information should always be presented as an aid to keeping their living situation intact rather than as a threatening problem which, if not heeded, will land them in a nursing home.

"Forgetful" is a word which is often associated with aging. However, older people remember *meaningful* information as well as anyone. While older people might forget someone's name because it's not important, they *will*, for example, remember to turn off a gas burner between the first and second match, especially if someone points out the danger of not doing so. Practice is an essential ingredient of teaching safety measures.



Many older people who get burned are already ill. Fires are often the by-product of minor strokes, heart attacks, and failing vision. Even though most fire accidents suffered by older people happen between 7 and 10 A.M., most house fires occur at 5 A.M. Since older people tend to sleep lightly, a functioning alarm system can rouse them easily.

However, the last thing older people want is to be displaced from their home. For this reason, many have been known to refuse to leave in the event of a fire, even if they have the opportunity. People must be prepared to leave in order to

save their lives. A burn to an older person is far more severe than to someone in good health 20 or 30 years younger. These possibilities should be discussed with older people so that they can anticipate the consequences and act appropriately if faced with the situation.

One suggestion is to keep all valuables in a fireproof box which could be thrown out of a window in case of fire.

It should also be remembered that older people have virtually *no* disposable income. This means that they are *not* likely to invest in fire extinguishers, escape ladders, or smoke detectors, or to replace faulty appliances. When teaching people fire safety, it is wise to always give advice and information which they can act on. In other words, it is pointless to insist that older people invest in smoke detectors when many can't afford a healthy diet, let alone doctor bills. This will only raise their anxiety level and inhibit them from practicing safety procedures which they might otherwise have done automatically.



## How Can You Interest Them in Fire Safety?

Older people are our greatest untapped resource and have a great deal to contribute to the field of fire safety. The fact that they have survived to old age indicates that they have lived relatively safe lives.

It is wise to remember that older people, like many younger people, can be prejudiced against older people. It is sometimes *not* a good idea to organize meetings around the theme of "fire safety for the elderly." Many people over 65 simply do not identify with being "one of the elderly." The same information can be communicated to people without an age bias. Appeal instead to the idea of "fire safety for people who live alone" or "fire safety for people who aren't mechanically inclined."

It is of primary importance to make group fire safety meetings *social* as well as *educational*. The great lack in older people's lives is having fun and there is nothing worse than an educational meeting which is not fun.

Time weighs heavily for many older people. They tend to experience two contradictory feelings at the same time—that they have too much time on their hands, and that time is running out. They are looking for things to do, ways to feel they are contributing something to the world around them.

There is, among the older population, a great wealth of talent to be drawn upon. For years, they have been cultivating their hobbies, such as drawing, painting, sewing, carpentry, electronics, and even dramatics. All these skills can be used to design fire safety programs for the community. By this method, the students become the teachers.

Older people are anxious to share their life histories. This rich base of experience can be built upon in teaching fire safety. Since most fire safety information is communicated in the form of "stories" about one incident or another, older people's desire to talk about their lives can be easily incorporated into this idea.

## What Existing Means of Communication Can Be Used to Reach the Older People?

There are many ways to reach older people without spending a lot of money on expensive media campaigns.

Older people naturally come in contact with children, grandchildren, and other relatives. They speak with neighbors and friends in diverse social organizations. They have frequent contact with numerous professionals in the health delivery system. Many older people are in communication with religious leaders. All these people influence them and provide them with information about how the world works. They are natural conduits for fire safety information.

While older people may have more curtailed activity patterns than younger people, there are certain places which they naturally frequent.

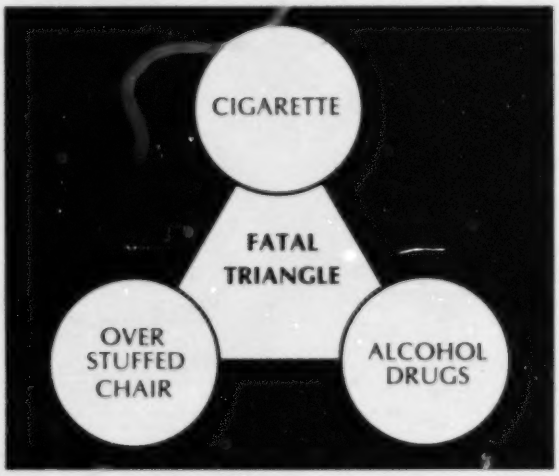
Churches, synagogues, and social clubs are regular "hang outs." They can also be found at hospitals, health clinics, and in public transportation facilities. Public assistance offices, such as social security headquarters, food stamp purchasing centers, and hot lunch programs are also places where those who live in cities can be found.

On a nice day, many older people are likely to go to parks or to sit outside their homes. Many can be found sitting on benches in housing projects and retirement communities. And, of course, like everyone else, they can be found in supermarkets and drug stores, stocking up on "essentials." All these places are good locations for distributing fire safety information.

They are also heavy consumers of television. More than any other medium, TV appeals to the older person. It serves as a "companion," and gives the feeling of "someone being there." They are especially likely to watch TV during the day and this would be a good time to try to teach them through public service time which broadcasters must provide.

Radio is another heavily used medium, but has limited utility in reaching people with hearing loss. When considering the use of any medium, thought should always be given to incorporating the fire safety message into existing programs for older people, whether they are TV or radio talk shows, specials, or columns in newspapers and magazines.

It is important to remember that not all people over 65 speak English and that not everyone reads. Since vision tends to deteriorate with age, it is especially important to set all printed information in large type. Similarly, television programs should routinely make use of large-type titles for the hard-of-hearing.

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This monograph is a rich source of fairly detailed information about the living arrangements of older people and the interrelationships between these arrangements and numerous economic variables. Home ownership, source and amount of income, amount and kind of expenses, age, rent paid, and marital status are among

the variables considered. Study based on a sample of 362,400 non-institutionalized older persons in four geographically distinct areas.

Butler, Robert. AGING AND MENTAL HEALTH: POSITIVE PSYCHOSOCIAL APPROACHES. C.V. Mosby Co., St. Louis, 1973.

This is a very readable general book which, as the title suggests, attempts to make positive suggestions for helping older people. The first part deals with the nature and problems of old age. The second deals with evaluation, treatment and prevention of psychological disorders in old age, and speaks particularly to those working with older people in various capacities.

Gray, Mrs. Barbara, Ph.D. HOME ACCIDENTS AMONG OLDER PEOPLE. Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, Royal Oak Centre, Purley, Surrey, U.K. CR22UR, 1966.

Contains much detailed information about the kinds of home accidents which older people are subject to, together with some suggestions for reducing the incidence of such accidents.

Kalish, Richard. LATE ADULTHOOD: PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN DEVELOPMENT. Brooks/Cole Publishing Co. (Div. of Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc.), Monterey, Cal., 1975.

An excellent, concise and up-to-date book on aging. Covers physical processes, psychological factors and the relationship of older people to others—family, neighbors and the wider society. Gives the reader a general familiarity with a great deal of the most recent reserch and literature on aging.

Kastenbaum, Robert. NEW THOUGHTS ON OLD AGE. Springer Publisher Co., Inc., New York, 1964.

This book is made up of a number of short articles on various topics relating to old age, most written by psychologists, sociologists and others who work with older people. Articles are generally scholarly, careful and well-documented. A large proportion deal with fairly specific problems of concern to psychologists, but there are also some which provide a more general overview.

Kimmel, Douglas C. ADULTHOOD AND AGING: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY DEVELOPMENTAL VIEW. John Wiley & Sons, New York, 1974.

A general college textbook which takes a developmental approach to adulthood and aging. Discusses sex roles, the family, work and leisure, personality and psychopathology, and concludes with several chapters on aging (biological and intellectual aspects) and dying and bereavement. Includes statistics and some case studies.

Kira, Alexander; Tucker, George; Cederstrom, Carl. HOUSING REQUIREMENTS OF THE AGED. Center for Urban Development Research, Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y., 1958.

This study is focused on housing the aged, and on how to devise housing which will better meet their special needs—physical, emotional and social. It contains an annotated bibliography which includes some more general literature on the elderly.

Mishara, Brian & Baker, Harvey. "Stimulus Intensity Modulation: A Perceptual-Cognitive Approach to Life Style in the Elderly." Educational Testing Service, Princeton, 1974.

Examines how one particular empirically testable feature of the way people handle incoming stimuli is an important determinant of their life style later in life. The point is made that aging must be seen in relation to the individual tendencies and makeup of the person, rather than as a process which will affect all people in the same way.

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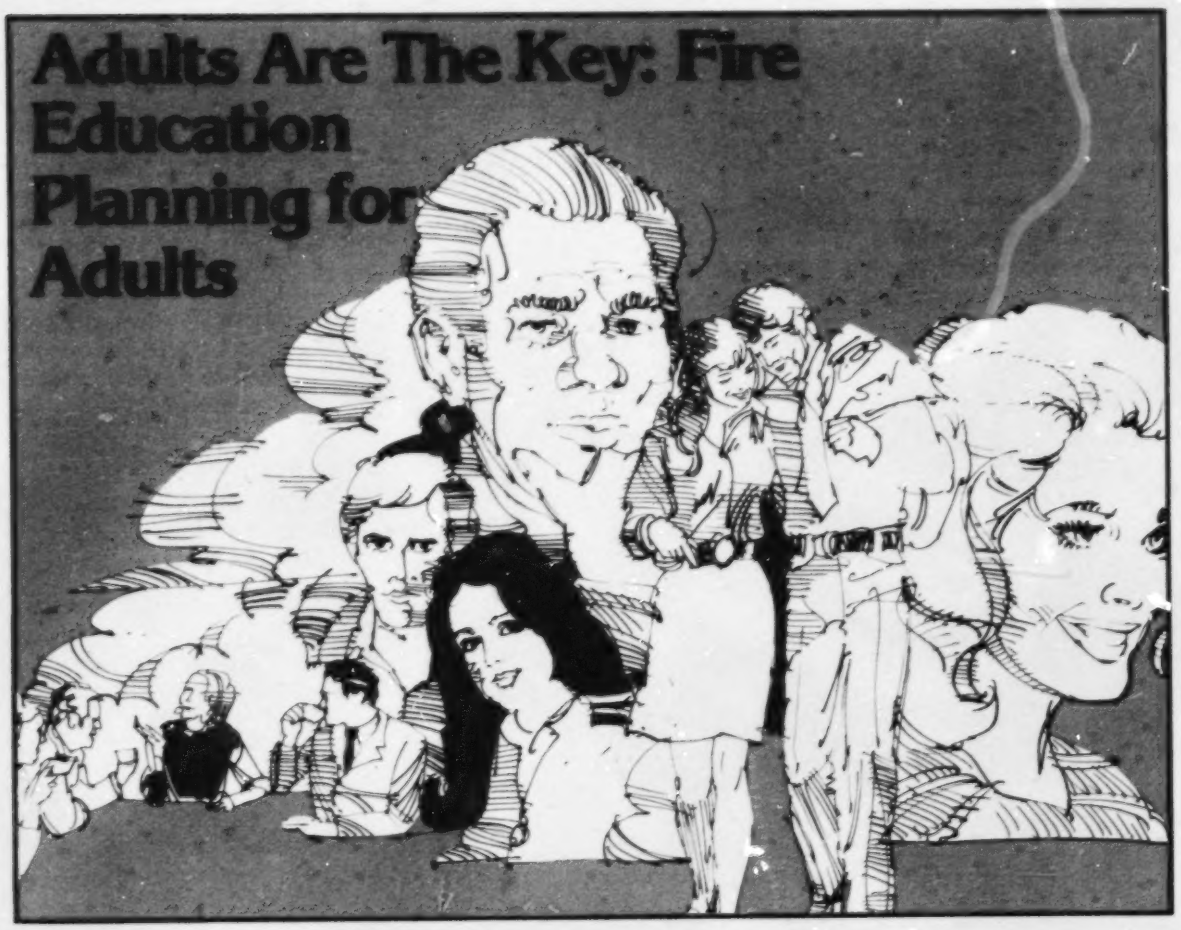
A study of the aging process written from a psychoanalytic point of view. Consists of a long and fairly general introducton by the authors (editors) and numerous short articles on detailed theoretical topics by psychoanalysts.




## Pamphlet Abstract

Adults have a major role to play in any fire education program. Adults—parents, consumers, community leaders, howeowners, teachers—make the decisions necessary to create fire safe environments for themselves and their families.

Children may hear about EDITH in school, but their parents must implement home evacuation procedures. Fire educators may feel that smoke detectors are important for life safety, but peo-

ple have to decide to buy and install them. The local Chief may know that the community has a serious fire problem, but influential people in the community must be motivated to confront that problem.

Unfortunately, when it comes to fire safety, adults too often think, "It can't happen to me." If fire educators are going to reach this very important audience, we must learn to change this attitude and motivate people to be fire safe.

This can be done by following a few basic principles for communicating fire safety to adults:

1) Tell them the facts about fire hazards to themselves and their families;
2) Appeal to their basic concerns, which will depend on who they are and where they live;
3) Be specific about hazards and appropriate behavior.

## Tell Adults the Facts

*America Burning* has told us the facts about the fire problem in the United States:

12,000 deaths per year
$11 billion in wasted resources
300,000 injuries

Adults need to know these facts, of course. But knowing the facts won't be enough to change the attitude of "It can't happen to me."

*Personalize* the facts. Make the statistics relevant to the people you are trying to reach.

- "Today, 33 people will die as a result of fire. See you tomorrow?"
- "*Every* person in the United States can expect to have three serious fires during their lifetime. How many have you had?"
- "We have been talking for one hour today. During that time, one person has died as a result of fire and twenty-five have been injured. Anyone you know?"

Tell adults the facts and personalize the information. And don't leave out the good news. The fact is, in communities where people have been educated about fire hazards and emergency procedures, fire losses have decreased dramatically.

## Appeal to Their Basic Concerns: Rural Areas

### Fire Hazards:

Fire is an important problem in rural areas. Woods and brush fires destroy acres of trees and cropland each year. Houses and barns are often old and have inadequate wiring. Since the Fire Department is often several miles away, a small fire can cause enormous damage before it is finally suppressed. The widespread use of farm machinery makes flammable liquids a particularly dangerous burn hazard.

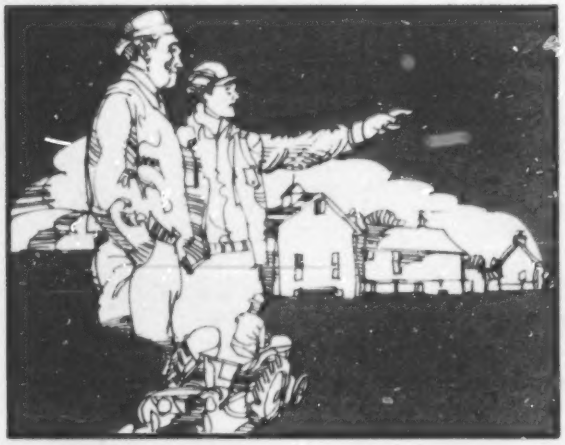
### Reaching the People:

Since they like to do things themselves, and cannot depend on fast response from the local Fire Department, rural people are very interested in fire safety information—if it is properly presented. For example:

1) Use the "personal contactor" method, pioneered in the rural South. Involve a well-known community person who can get to know people on a personal basis and offer fire prevention assistance to them without forcing it on them.

2) Since the Fire Department's response time may be slow because of the distances travelled, teach people what to do until the Fire Department arrives.

3) Work through extension agents, who already know most of the people in a given area, to communicate fire safety ideas.



4) Communicate practical advice about specific hazards and specific solutions. In Southeastern Missouri, flammable liquids associated with farm machinery were picked as a main target for fire education. In Ohio, early warning devices and evacuation procedures are now the focus of a major educational effort.

## Appeal to Their Basic Concerns: Suburban Areas

### Fire Hazards:

Power lawn mowers, barbeque grills, and mini-bikes make flammable liquids a frequent suburban fire hazard. Cooking and appliance fires, and upholstery fires caused by careless smoking are also major problems. Many homes have upstairs bedrooms and escape planning is a must.

### Reaching the People:

Many suburban adults are homeowners, families with young children, and have a strong sense of community. Use these characteristics to your advantage:

1) Home inspection programs are very effective in suburban areas because of the high percentage of homeowners in these areas.

2) Because suburban people are sometimes better off financially than rural or urban residents, they may be more responsive to buying fire safety devices, such as smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. Tell people to call the local Fire Prevention Bureau for information.

3) In-school programs are still very effective in suburban areas, with adults being reached primarily through their children.

## Appeal to Their Basic Concerns: Urban Areas

### Fire Hazards:

Structural problems are major fire hazards in the city, where older buildings are often inadequately wired and poorly heated. High population densities make the threat of conflagration ever-present. Abandoned buildings have increasingly become fire hazards, as have abandoned cars. Trash and rubbish accumulations are another major fire danger in urban neighborhoods.

### Reaching the People:

A community-by-community approach works best in urban areas. Different neighborhoods require different approaches:

1) *Use other city agencies* in the fire prevention effort. In Chicago, the "Operation Pride" home inspection program got the Department of Sanitation to make special rubbish pick-ups as part of their program.

2) *Use local media* to reach the people. In Los Angeles, a firefighter is writing articles about fires he fights in a neighborhood newspaper.

3) *Identify the reasons* for high fire rates. In New Orleans, the Fire Department is cooperating with a team of social scientists interviewing neighborhood residents in depth to find out why the area has so many fires.

4) *Appeal to neighborhood pride* by using an "urban contactor" program. Get *local people* involved in fire safety as one aspect of improving the community.

## Be Specific about Hazards and Appropriate Behavior

The adult audience is large and diverse, requiring many different kinds of messages and prevention programs. A single person living

alone may have no interest in knowing how to make a home safe for infants. The same person might be interested in smoke detectors. A homeowner may be very concerned with housefires, but bored with information about high rise safety.

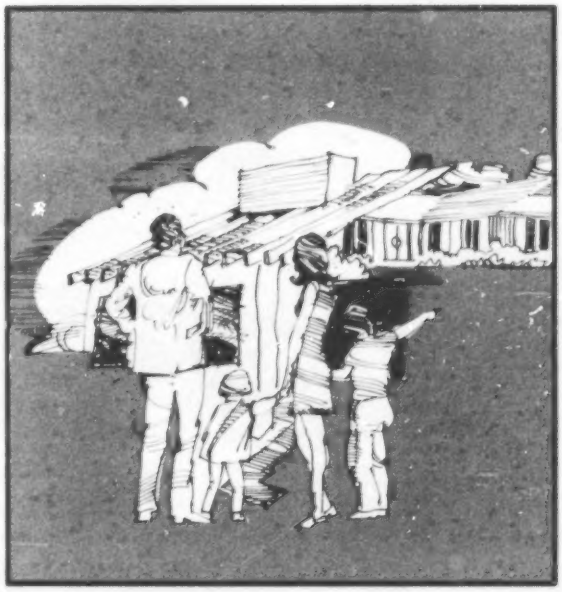
Research has shown that the most effective fire safety programs target specific messages to specific audiences. Also, it is especially important to tell adults *what to do* about hazards, not just to warn them of dangers. If you warn a person not to use gasoline as a solvent, suggest a substitute that is safe.

The chart shown below is just one example of how you can begin to think about all the adults in your community and the best ways to reach them.

| SITUATION | HAZARD | PROGRAM |
|---|---|---|
| Expectant Parents | Scalds to Infants | Making the Home Safe for Babies |
| Parents: Young Children | Match Play | Proper Procedure |
| Apartment Dwellers | High Rise Fires | High Rise Fire Safety |
| Homeowners | House Fires | Home Inspections |

## Community Fire Education Master Planning

Individuals can of course do a great deal to reduce fire losses throughout the United States. But the most dramatic decreases in fire deaths have resulted from concerted community action



at the local level.

The most effective public fire education programs have involved step-by-step planning with broad community participation throughout the process. These types of programs have resulted in measured reductions in fire losses as high as 60%.

The Public Education Office of the National Fire Prevention and Control Administration recommends a five step planning process which includes:

1) Identification of the most important local fire problem;
2) Selection of the most effective strategy to deal with the problem;
3) Design of a community fire education program;
4) Implementation of the program;
5) Evaluation of the program's effects.

This type of program is a good way to involve many of the adults in your community in fire safety activities.

For further information, write:

Public Education Office
National Fire Prevention and
Control Administration
P.O. Box 19518
Washington, D.C. 20036

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## Pamphlet Abstract

This pamphlet is designed to assist fire educators, social workers, counsellors, therapists, and others who are working with youthful firesetters. The pamphlet offers indications as to how one might "spot" a potential firesetter, makes distinctions as to the severity of different acts of firesetting, provides suggestions for methods of treatment, and presents eight common myths about firesetters.

*ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:* This pamphlet and its accompanying chart have been produced with the help of a number of professionals in the field of fire and burn prevention. Their critical perspective has been crucial to the development of this work:

Chief Henry Litteral, Lt. John Haney, and Inspector Michael Such, all of the Upper Arlington, Ohio, Fire Department; Dr. Dennis Billingsley, Director, Northwest Mental Health Services, Columbus, Ohio; Clair Young, Extension Safety Specialist, Ohio State University; Dr. William Folkman, Senior Social Scientist, Pacific Southwest Range and Experiment Station, Berkeley, California; Lonnie Jackson, Public Education Officer, Mt. Prospect, Illinois, Fire Department; Matthew Maley, Public Education Coordinator, Shriner's Burn Institute, Cincinnati, Ohio; Elizabeth McLoughlin, Project Manager, Burn Prevention Project, Boston, Mass.; and Chief Larry Pairitz, Mt. Prospect, Illinois, Fire Department.

## How to Spot a Potential Firesetter

Most of the research which has been published about firesetters has been done by psychiatrists and psychologists. There are many opinions and interpretations of why people set fires. Thus, it is difficult to state "facts" about firesetters. What we have done in this pamphlet is to present the "best thinking" on the subject. A comprehensive bibliography from which the material has been drawn is included at the end of the pamphlet.

The cloud of uncertainties which has hung over "firesetting" has given rise to many misunderstandings and misimpressions about firesetters. Firesetting is one of the most dangerous forms of anti-social behavior. As a result, a wide range of attitudes and images about firesetters exists in people's minds.

In this pamphlet we hope to dispel some of these myths and provide constructive information on this difficult area of fire education.

## Spotting a Potential Firesetter and Activities for Preventing Potential Fires

1. A. OBSERVATION:
   A child who sets fires may exhibit poor judgment, poor impulse control and may be accident-prone or hyperactive.

   B. EXPLANATION:
   Although it's not always clear which is the cart and which is the horse, researchers say that hyperactivity, accident-proneness, poor judgement, and lack of impulse control are often seen in children who set fires. The fires which these children set are usually not malicious, but rather are "play" fires which get out of control through faulty reasoning or inappropriate emergency response.

## Are You Prejudiced: Eight Myths about Firesetters

*Do you think that any child who sets a fire is sick?* In fact, most children seem to go through a period of healthy interest in fire and may even set fires. This does not necessarily mean that they will continue to set fires and/or become chronic firesetters.

*Do you believe firesetters are bad people?* While their behavior is socially unacceptable, firesetters' actions should be recognized as a legitimate call for help. Most firesetters are deeply troubled, unhappy people who are usually emotionally deprived.

*Do you think that firesetting and arson are the same thing?* They are not. Firesetters are motivated by psychological problems. Arsonists are motivated by money, although they may also have psychological problems.

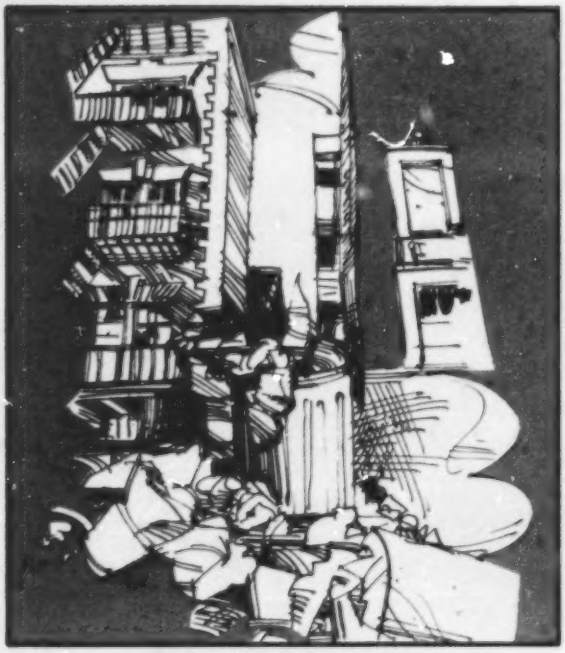
*Do very young children set fires intentionally?* Yes. Intentional firesetting has been observed by psychiatrists in children as young as two and one-half years of age.

*Are most firesetters in their early 20's?* Not necessarily. Firesetters can be found in every age group including the elderly and children. Each year an increasing proportion of fires is started by children.

*Do only poor people set fires?* No. Income level is not necessarily a determinant of whether a person will set a fire or not. However, poverty does affect a child's environment which in turn may create some of the emotional problems leading to firesetting behavior.

*Do people only set fires for sexual thrills?* No. There are many reasons why people set fires. Very few people set fires for sexual reasons.

*Once a firesetter, always a firesetter.* Not at all. Like anyone else, a firesetter can change. Firesetting is a call for help, a signal of an unmet emotional need. If the call is heeded and the person's emotional needs are met, there will no longer be a need to set fires.



C. EXAMPLE:
An 8-year-old boy, playing with matches in the neighborhood "fort," drops a burning match and starts a small brushfire.

D. REMEDIAL ACTIVITIES:
These children need to receive attention, support, and fire education. They especially need help in improving their judgement and knowledge about fire. The following activities are suggested for working with these children:

- A trip to the local firehouse to meet and talk with firefighters about their work.
- A trip to a burned-out building to give a true picture of the danger of firesetting. Firefighters have found this to be particularly effective if a child of the same age was injured in the fire.
- Teach children the principles of fire and how to recognize common fire hazards, as well as how to control and put out small fires.
- Do everything you can to improve the child's self-image by rewarding good behavior, taking time to explain things when the child seems confused, being physically affectionate, and so on.
- Talk to the child's parents and offer counseling and support. If the child has been presenting difficulties in the school environment and elsewhere, chances are that the parents are experiencing difficulties at home with the child also.

**2.** A. OBSERVATION:
A child who sets fires may be a school behavior problem, be a bully, is usually a loner, and, consequently, may have a hard time making friends.

B. EXPLANATION:
According to psychologists and firefighters who have worked with firesetters, children who set fires are not happy. It has been observed that, in a large number of cases, children who set fires do not come from supportive or comfortable home environments. They have poor self-images and feel "lousy" about their life situations. All this leads to conflicts with peers, teachers, and other symbols of authority.

These children's problems are also often further complicated by learning impairments. The inability to do well in school can be a considerable source of embarrassment and frustration to these children. This situation only contributes to their poor self-image and feelings of rage against the world. Fires set by these children are signals for the need for immediate help.

C. EXAMPLE:
A 12-year-old boy who is failing in school is reprimanded by his teacher for provoking other classmates. After class, he sets a fire in the school bathroom.

D. REMEDIAL ACTIVITIES:
These children may share many of the characteristics of the first group, but probably have more severe conflicts at home as well. Their self-images are worse, their sense of anger and frustration is more intense. In terms of preventing these children from setting fires, all of the sugges-

tions made for the first group are relevant. The following ideas are also suggested:

- Individual informal counseling with the child to discuss family situation and feelings about school. Aim at improving the child's self-image if only by giving him or her extra attention and concern.
- Obtain professional counseling advice to determine the kind of therapeutic intervention needed.
- Suggest family counseling if the child's situation seems to require it. Referral can be made to a social service agency to determine the type of family or individual treatment needed.

**3.** A. OBSERVATION:
A child who sets fires may have great trouble verbalizing feelings, may engage in stealing, cruelty to animals, or seem unusually self-destructive.

B. EXPLANATION:
Firesetting is frequently the act of children who have no means of expressing their anger except through their behavior. For these children, fire is a language through which they try to express their needs and obtain help. Since there are few things as infuriating as not being able to express oneself, the fires these children set are often quite severe, in proportion to their needs.

C. EXAMPLE:
An 11-year-old girl who had been picked up for shoplifting refuses to talk to anyone about what happened. Several days later, she sets a fire in her own bedroom.

D. REMEDIAL ACTIVITIES:
Although these children share some of the characteristics of the first and second groups, they are clearly in need of immediate therapeutic help. In addition to the procedures outlined above, the following steps should be taken:

- Refer the child to a qualified therapist for ongoing treatment.
- Try to interest the child in alternative outlets for destructive energy, such as games, sports, and other activities involving learning experiences.
- Speak with the child's family to make sure they understand the seriousness of the problem.

**4.** A. OBSERVATION:
A child who sets fires may be overly obedient, purposely inobtrusive, have no sense of humor, and may appear to have "given up."

B. EXPLANATION:
While many of us tend to think of rowdy, mischievous children as the "problem" kids, it is often those who are the quietest who need the most help. Psychologists agree that, in terms of mental health, it is healthier to express anger than to remain in quiet despair and resignation. The impulse to start a fire may be buried so deeply in these children that they are not fully in touch with their anger. If they don't express this anger outwardly, they may turn it inward even further, resulting in psychosis, violent behavior towards other people, or possibly suicide.

C. EXAMPLE:
A 9-year-old boy is the middle child with one older brother and one younger brother. No one notices him—neither his parents nor his teachers. One day, he sets a fire in a vacant building on his street and he injures himself.

D. REMEDIAL ACTIVITIES:
Children such as these are very unhappy and may set fires, become self-destructive, or take other extreme action if they are not helped. In addition to obtaining professional counseling, the following ideas are suggested:

- Use role-playing to encourage the child to express inner changes.
- Enlist the help of the local Big Brother or Big Sister program to make the child feel "special," noticed, and loved.

**5.** A. OBSERVATION:
Firesetting can be the act of a child who is trying to come to grips with a sudden life change such as divorce, a death in the family, the birth of a new child, or moving to a new community.

B. EXPLANATION:
Many children respond to new, previously unconfronted situations by enormous changes in their own behavior. Teachers and others who work regularly with children should be made aware to look for sudden changes in children's behavior. If a child whose school marks and behavior have been very good suddenly begins to fail in school and/or present conflicts in the class, he or she may respond next by setting a fire.

C. EXAMPLE:
A 7-year-old boy, previously known as "a model student," becomes sullen, uncommunicative, and begins to daydream in class following the birth of a little sister. He sets a fire in the basement where his parents have stored the baby equipment.

D. REMEDIAL ACTIVITIES:
When sudden changes in behavior are observed, the child should be talked with—before a fire is set. Usually, these children may need no more than a little extra time and concern. However, in certain cases, they may need therapeutic assistance. In addition to this alternative, the following steps should be taken:

- Talk to the child to find out what is happening in his or her life. Encourage expression of painful and angry feelings.
- If it seems appropriate under the circumstances, talk to the parents about the causes of the change in the child's behavior.

**6.** A. OBSERVATION:
Firesetting may be the act of children with severe emotional or organic handicaps.

B. EXPLANATION:
While it is important to stress that the vast majority of firesetters are not "mentally ill" or severely retarded, it is equally important to realize that some of these children are suffering from these problems. In cases such as these, firesetting is only one of a number of symptoms indicating a severe problem.

C. EXAMPLE:
A 6-year-old boy, who has been identified as a "special needs" child by school officials, begins setting fires.

D. REMEDIAL ACTIVITIES:
These children are, hopefully, already receiving specialized assistance. However, it is often painfully difficult for parents to acknowledge to themselves and others that their children may have serious and perhaps permanent handicaps. Early detection of severe problems is very important. The following steps are suggested:

- Always consult a professional counsellor to make sure you understand the scope of the child's problem before approaching the child or the parents.
- When you feel comfortable about your understanding, talk with the parents about available alternatives.
- Encourage school officials to integrate fire safety education into the curricula for "special needs" children.
- Follow-up to make sure some sort of help is forthcoming to the child.

**7.** A. OBSERVATION:
Children who set fires may otherwise be mentally healthy. Many firefighters have found boredom, curiosity, peer pressure, and vandalism to be at the root of these children's motivations in setting fires.

B. EXPLANATION:
Firesetting is one of many forms of anti-social behavior which are found, particularly, in young boys. In a certain way, these kids are the hardest to reach because they are already alienated from authority figures. Also, because these kids often set fires as a group activity, it is difficult to pin down one single cause or one individual as responsible.

C. EXAMPLE:
In an upper middle class suburb, a number of fires occur in August of "undetermined origin." Having observed the problem before, firefiighters realize that this is the work of a group of kids who "hang out" together every night.

D. REMEDIAL ACTIVITIES:
The key to solving this problem lies in redirecting these children's energies. While individuals in the group may be in need of counseling, the solution is more on the level of providing healthy alternatives for the kids. Any of the following activities are suggested:

- Plan fire prevention activities which involve these kids for the end of the summer when boredom is at its maximum.
- Enlist these kids in community clean up activities.
- Train these kids to do fire prevention work with younger children.
- Use rewards to reinforce positive community activities on the part of the kids.
- Combine fire prevention activities with sports programs in which firefighters participate to rechannel the energy of the firesetting children.

## A Program That Works: Treating Youthful Firesetters

In an upper-middle class community in Ohio, members of the fire prevention bureau have developed an effective method for dealing with youthful firesetters.

Lt. John Haney of the Upper Arlington Fire Department has been working with firesetters for more than a decade and has come to rely on a process which involves three levels of counseling. This three tiered approach recognizes that the three parties to the process—fire prevention bureau personnel, family physician, and psychiatrist—each are equipped to play unique roles in helping the child. The fire prevention personnel can talk about the fire itself but are not in the appropriate position to recommend psychiatric therapy. This recommendation is more appropriately given by the family physician. Lt. Haney uses the following procedure:

1. A discussion with the firesetter to establish how the fire happened and why.
2. A discussion with the parents to explain the problem *and* the suggestion that the child see the family physician.
3. The family physician, having worked with the prevention bureau previously, recommends to the parents that the child see a psychologist for therapeutic treatment.
4. The psychologist requires that the child pay a token amount for each treatment as an indication of commitment.

5. The prevention officer follows up to find out what has happened to the child and maintains a simple file on each incident.

This program, coupled with frequent school visits to promote fire prevention, has resulted in firesetting having been reduced dramatically in Upper Arlington. Similar programs in other communities have had the same results.

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## Pamphlet Abstract

This pamphlet is designed to assist fire educators in planning programs for children and their caretakers. The pamphlet takes a developmental approach to fire education for children, emphasizing that different fire hazards are particularly dangerous to children at different stages of their growth. Specific program ideas are included for each age group.

*ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:* This pamphlet and its accompanying chart have been produced with the help of a number of professionals in the field of fire and burn prevention. Their critical perspective has been crucial to the development of this work:

John A. Locke, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, Boston, Mass.; Geraldine Saunders, elementary school teacher, Roxbury, Mass.; Geraldine Robinson, Early Childhood Specialist, The Children's Museum, Boston, Mass.; Cheryl Healer, Project Director, and Vivian Guilfoy, Educational Program Developer, both of the Burn Prevention Project, Boston, Mass.; Joseph L. Donovan, Assistant Chief of Training, Massa-

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## Fire Education Planning for Children

This pamphlet is organized into four main sections, each of which corresponds to a specific period during a child's development. Each section also contains a list of activities for reaching children and/or their caretakers with fire safety education during these different times.

The sections are:

1) *Birth to Age Two:* When babies are incapable of taking care of themselves, and need to have a safe environment created for them by adults and older brothers and sisters.

2) *Ages Two to Five:* When children learn to walk, talk and explore the world, sometimes testing adults with dangerous actions such as playing with matches.

3) *Ages Six to Twelve:* When children develop manual skills, and want to learn how to use tools of the adult world, such as stoves and barbecue grills.

4) *Ages Thirteen to Seventeen:* When children become teenagers, and want increased independence from their parents and other adults. At the same time, they are also beginning to drive cars, cook, smoke cigarettes, and otherwise experience a whole new range of major fire hazards.



## Age, Fire and Special Factors

This pamphlet is organized around the idea of *human development*. It emphasizes what children are like at different ages, which fire hazards threaten them, and how to protect and teach them at different times in their lives.

Young children are *most* threatened by fire and burn hazards but they are *least* capable of learning fire safety principles. Older children are in less danger, but they are better equipped to learn and act on fire safety information. For this reason, fire education should be divided into two stages.

The first stage involves teaching very young children that "hot things hurt," "matches are not for children," and to drop and roll immediately if clothing catches fire. In addition to these simple messages, fire safety for children under five must rely on parents' and other caretakers' understanding of the importance of supervision and a safe environment. The second stage of fire education can begin around age five when most children are able to grasp simple concepts of cause and effect, and to exercise good judgment to protect themselves.

This picture of a child's development is modified by special factors, such as psychological problems or economic deprivation. Many "accident-prone" children have been found to be suffering from malnutrition, to have been born prematurely, or to be caught up by severe family problems. The fire educator may find that these kinds of factors pose a greater hazard to the child than a simple lack of knowledge. Fire educators must learn to look at the whole child—not just the level of fire safety information—for signs of vulnerability to fire and burn accidents.

In the same way, the community plays a major role in creating a fire safe environment for children. Researchers have found that neighborhoods which have lost their pride are high risk areas for fires. Transiency, in both rich and poor areas, is also linked with a high fire rate. Children living in these environments will be exposed to a greater risk from fire and burn hazards than children in more stable communities. The fire educator may have to involve the whole

community in fire safety in order to help the children.

## A Developmental Approach to Fire Safety Education—Birth to Age Two: The Age of Dependence

Babies are relatively helpless creatures and they need adults to create a safe environment for them as they are growing up. Early childhood is a high risk time for human beings, with about 12% of all fire deaths occurring in the under-five age group. Fire educators must concentrate on communicating to parents and other caretakers about the specific fire and burn hazards which threaten small children. What should these adults be told and how should they be reached?

The two most important ideas to communicate are:

1) the necessity for careful supervision, and
2) the importance of a safe environment.

Since neither total supervision nor an absolutely safe environment is possible to achieve, parents and caretakers should be urged to try for a reasonable mix of both approaches. Neither one can do the whole job.

Most parents know that small children need supervision. What they may forget is that stress or other demands can take their attention away from children for a fatal moment. Be specific in describing these dangers. Try to help young parents, for example, *picture* "fatal moments," such as the hot coffee spilled on an infant as the mother turns away to answer the phone.

When it comes to hazards, emphasize that *scalds* are a greater danger to very small children than are burns caused by open flames. A pot of hot water tipped over from a stove, a spilled cup of coffee, and bath water which is much too hot are all major burn hazards to the very young. Often the child is not only scalded but also otherwise injured when a tablecloth or doily is pulled off a table. In many cases, it is *careless action by an adult* (such as spilling a cup of coffee) which poses the greatest danger to the young child. Safe adult behavior should be emphasized as an essential element in creating a safe environment for children.

Most parents also know that small children need a safe environment, but they may not go so far as to carefully eliminate *all* fire and burn hazards on a systematic basis. Teach parents to:

1) remove all unnecessary extension cords,
2) cover all outlets with plugs, and
3) remove dangerous substances from within reach.

In general, try to get parents to see the environment from a baby's, rather than an adult's, perspective.

The best time to begin educating parents about fire safety may be before the child is born. During the pre-natal period, parents actively seek information about babies and child-rearing, and may be especially receptive to fire and burn prevention information. Many hospitals conduct birth preparation classes for prospective parents and these sessions represent ideal forums for the presentation of fire safety information.

No one is more alert to ideas for protecting infants than the new parents. It is up to the fire educator to ensure that they learn fire and burn prevention.

## Activities

1) Hold a workshop about fire and burn prevention for small children. Invite people who are health professionals for prospective parents. Start by calling a local obstetrician or pediatrician and ask for names of other people who would be interested.
2) Ask the person in charge of birth preparation classes at a local hospital for permis-

sion to address one of the class sessions. Use the time to teach specific "preparation activities," such as making the home safe for the baby.

3) Develop materials (brochures, filmstrips) which clearly show "fatal moments," where an adult's careless action can cause burn injuries to a child.

4) Establish contacts with local day care centers and offer to create a fire safe environment for their children. Emphasize positive assistance, so that they will not feel threatened by a Fire Department visit.

5) Teach people what to do to protect their children if a fire does occur (home escape planning, for example) or if the child's clothing catches on fire (drop and roll).

## **Two to Five:** The Age of Experimentation

Babies become active children very fast. Parents often don't realize how quickly they change. Within a short period of time, they can walk and run, and feel far less dependent on their parents for their every need. However, this new assertiveness poses a threat to the child's safety.

Children at this age learn by imitation and are eager to know about and do new things. They find it hard to understand, for example, why they should not play with matches when they are in an environment where they constantly see adults lighting cigarettes. Children of this age need to learn how to control their urges and must understand what it means when an adult makes a rule forbidding them to do something that they want to do. Obviously, adults have to make some rules concerning children's behavior, but children learn best by example.

During this period, the scald hazards which threaten younger children are still a problem, but new dangers appear as well. The child's increasing mobility and manual dexterity increases the threat of *self-injury* (pulling a pot of water over rather than having it spilled by someone else). Some children may also begin to play with matches at this time, and, by around the age of five, the symptoms of "abnormal" firesetting can start to appear.

Parents and caretakers have to be doubly aware of fire dangers at this age and should realize that telling a child not to do something "because it's dangerous" may not be enough to insure the child's safety. It is not wise to count too much on rules and explanations. Supervision, a safe environment, and good examples are still the most effective methods of fire and burn prevention.

Parents should also be made aware of the role of older brothers and sisters and babysitters in protecting young children. Brothers and sisters can supervise young children when necessary, but they should never be considered a replacement for adult caretakers. Babysitters are often young people who themselves need instruction in fire safety. In fact, many fire safety programs are designed for babysitters, such as the one conducted by the Santa Ana, California, Fire Department as part of that city's year-round fire prevention program.

From the fire educator's point of view, the age *of three* is about the earliest time for children to grasp simple concepts necessary for learning fire safety. Children at this age have a short attention span and can only be expected to concentrate on a few things at a time, so simplicity is a must. Nancy Dennis, of the First Service Training

Center in Stillwater, Oklahoma, presents a program for three and four year olds, concentrating on two simple ideas: "Stop, drop, and roll," and "Matches are not for children." The program is very short, using simple slides and demonstrations.

The age of five marks the onset of maximum interest in fire play, and confronts parents with the difficult question of how to deal with this new interest. In Cincinnati, Ohio, Matthew Maley of the Shriner's Burn Institute, has devised a program which emphasizes that "A match is a tool," stressing proper procedure with fire and practice in lighting matches. In Boston, Massachusetts, the Montessori School teaches children to use matches, but imposes a rule that children may only light a match in an adult's presence.

Whichever approach is chosen, fire educators, parents, and teachers should be prepared to deal with fireplay at this age.

## Activities

1) Hold workshops in your community with day care, nursery school, and kindergarten workers. Teach them how to deal with children who show interest in playing with matches. Teach them how to recognize fire hazards in their facilities and also how to treat burns in an emergency.

2) A good activity for children this age, and one which can easily be taught to child care workers, is to simulate a fire situation with a sheet dyed grey or black. Have two adults stretch the sheet wide and make it billow, simulating smoke descending slowly from the ceiling to the floor. Tell the children to crawl low under the smoke where they will be able to breathe and go to a door or window. You might, using small red balls or streamers, hand certain children an object which symbolizes fire and teach them to "stop, drop, and roll" as soon as the object touches them. Also, teach children to do a football tackle below the knees and roll other children when they are "on fire."

3) You can sometimes get the clothing of children who have been burned from a burn center or hospital. Draw an outline of a child on a large piece of mat board and paste the burnt clothing on the outline. Label the poster with the injured child's first name and age and use the poster to talk about what can happen when little children play with matches or other fire tools. Stress the importance of dropping and rolling to put out a clothing fire.

## **Six to Twelve:** The Age of Identity

Children between the ages of six and twelve are in a stage of rapid learning. By the age of six or seven, children are able to understand some of the more complex ideas which are required for learning about fire safety. Between the ages of eight and twelve, the ability to grasp such concepts as the relationship between cause and effect increases noticeably, making this an appropriate age for teaching a new type of fire safety—based on understanding and good sense rather than supervision and simple rules.

While this age group is not as "high risk" as younger children, new types of fire dangers do appear at this time. The interest in fire play which begins at age five peaks at seven, especially among boys. Also, "peer group pressure" creates dangerous behavior such as climbing utility poles, which often leads to high tension wire accidents. Firecrackers and similar explosives remain a perennial danger for this age group, and flammable liquids become a new danger as youngsters begin to play with gasoline-driven mini-bikes, power mowers, tractors, etc. Cigarette smoking may also become a problem especially since children often attempt to hide this kind of experimentation from adults.

Fortunately, fire educators also have more access to children of this age because they are in school. In Guilford, North Carolina, for example, Cathy Lohr of the County Fire Marshal's Office conducts a year-round program for fifth graders, and in Boston, Mass., Elizabeth McLoughlin has developed a presentation about the dangers of high tension wires for junior high school students.

As children get older, they are anxious to be productive and to get approval from parents and

other adults. Through fire education efforts, they can be "enlisted" in fire safety campaigns which include responsibilities that go beyond providing for their own safety. They can be asked to take some responsibility for their own homes, and for their parents and younger brothers and sisters. Giving out "home hazard check lists" or using the Junior Fire Marshal program designed by the Hartford Insurance Company are effective approaches which have been used in many schools.

This is also an especially important time for parents and teachers to watch for signs of abnormal firesetting, which will increasingly show up as a destructive act rather than simple experimentation. Children are very involved in developing their own identities and personalities at this time, and frustration due to lack of support at home or at school can lead to firesetting as a rage reaction. Firesetting is usually one of the many elements in a disturbed child's response to the world. If the problem is severe, professional help may be required.

## Activities

1) Call the local school superintendent for permission to hold teacher workshops on in-service days (for which teachers get credit). Teach the teachers the basics of how to integrate fire education into existing curricula. Write to the NFPCA for examples of in-school programs which have used this approach. These workshops can be used to motivate teachers and show them that fire education is an exciting and worthwhile part of their job.
2) Develop materials which stress the role of young children in assisting their families and communities. If possible, pass out home hazard checklists and emergency fire telephone stickers at each presentation. Give the children something specific to do, including making their own fire prevention materials.
3) Teach younger children how to call the Fire Department. Simulate this activity with toy phones, with one child reporting the fire and another pretending to be a firefighter answering the call.
4) Work with youth groups, which attract young people at this age, such as 4-H, Boy and Girl Scouts, etc. Try to get these groups to integrate fire safety into their programs, and to support specific fire prevention activities in the community.
5) Ask local gym teachers to be sure to include in their regular curriculum fire safety emergency procedures such as dropping and rolling or crawling low in a fire. Ask them to also discuss the dangers of high tension wires, often encountered while climbing trees, flying kites, and flying model airplanes.

## **Thirteen to Seventeen:** The Age of Independence

As "children" become "teenagers," they are growing rapidly both physically and mentally. As any parent knows, teenagers feel a real need for independence from their parents and the rest of the adult world. Teenagers do not particularly enjoy being told what to do and high school kids have long been a difficult audience for fire educators to reach. Teenagers unfortunately tend to adopt a rather typical adult attitude towards fire safety: "It can't happen to me." Young people often like to take risks, and fire safety simply isn't high on their list of priorities.

At the same time, teenagers are increasingly exposed to the whole range of hazards confronted by older and (sometimes) more responsible adults. A new interest in cars or motorcycles means more exposure to flammable liquids. Drinking and smoking, a deadly combination at any age, now becomes a more frequent activity. Cooking also poses hazards to young people just learning this skill.

What can be done to break through the teenager's sense of immortality? One approach is that taken by Elizabeth McLoughlin, of the Shriner's Burn Institute, Boston, Massachusetts, in dealing with high tension wire accidents. She

feels that young people see only two possible outcomes to risk-taking behavior: that they will die, or that nothing will happen, ignoring the possibility of a disfiguring injury. Concentrating on this possibility seems to help her reach teenagers.

Another approach is to appeal to teenagers' new sense of responsibility for themselves and for others. They need independence, but also realize that they must behave responsibly in order to deserve their freedom. A further key factor is to communicate on their level and in their language. In Schenectady, New York, Firefighter Pat Dugan has developed an extremely effective high school program along these lines. Dugan and his partner are young, dress in contemporary styles ("absolutely no uniforms") and establish a rapport with their students which is essential to the success of the program in their area.

Teenagers are too old to be threatened with scare stories. They should be taught proper procedures with fire, and their growing responsibilities as young adults should be counted on to help insure that they practice those procedures. Fire safety information can be logically integrated into home economics and industrial arts curricula. Teenagers are also interested in the question of careers. Descriptions of the various occupations related to fire prevention can be used as a way into talking about fire safety.

## Activities

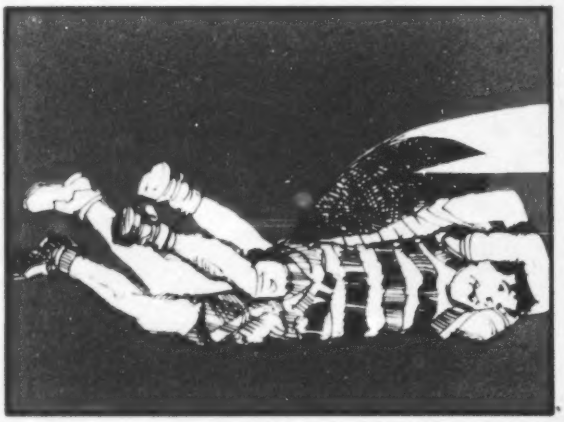
1) Continue to integrate fire safety into the school curriculum, this time in junior high and high school. Get driver education instructors to teach about car fires, industrial arts classes to teach about flammable liquids, and home economics classes to review kitchen safety.

2) Organize a fire cadet program in conjunction with the local Fire Department. Use the program to teach fire prevention as well as firefighting activities.

3) Work with media people who appeal to teenagers to develop fire and burn prevention presentations. Local radio sports programs, for example, have a large youthful audience, and their hosts are often very public spirited.

4) Use babysitting clinics to teach young people about all aspects of fire safety. Try to involve kids who babysit for their younger brothers and sisters, as well as those who babysit for other families.

## Points to Remember



The following points sum up the main ideas expressed in this pamphlet:

1) *Two Audiences:* When children are very small, the main audience for fire education will be adults—parents, babysitters, and other caretakers of small children. Around the age of three, children can begin to understand ideas about fire safety, and become a second audience for fire education.

2) *Education in Stages:* Children under five suffer more fire and burn injuries and deaths than older children, but they are less able to understand *ideas* about fire and burn hazards. They need very simple forms of instruction, with more complex concepts being taught later on.

3) *Special Education:* Children with special physical and/or emotional handicaps are, like very young children, more likely to be injured by fire or burn hazards because of slow response time or limited physical abilities. They and their parents will therefore require special attention from fire educators.

4) *Poverty:* Children from poor families may be unable to avoid injury because they live in

extremely dangerous environments. Fire educators may have to contribute to the improvement of these environments before they can effectively get on with the job of educating parents and children about fire safety.

5) *Adult Support:* Regardless of their age and situation, children cannot practice fire safety without adult support. Fire education in the schools, for example, won't be effective unless it is reinforced by family attitudes and proper parental behavior.

6) *Fascination with Fire:* Children seem to pass through a phase of healthy interest in fire. Malicious fire-setting by children is, on the other hand, the result of deep-seated psychological problems which require special attention.

7) *A Passing Phase:* A child's maximum interest in fire occurs between the ages of five and seven, which suggests that school programs should begin in kindergarten in order to be most effective.

8) *Threats and Promises:* Telling younger chilgren about the negative consequences of dangerous behavior may be effective, but it should not be over-done. Teaching the meaning of "hot," for example, should be done in a way that emphasizes the child's safety rather than being done in a punitive manner.

9) *Proper Procedures:* The older a child becomes, the less it is likely that he or she is going to respond to threats. Older children and adolescents should be taught proper procedures in order to achieve a maximum effect.

10) *Plenty of Help:* Some of the most successful fire education programs in the country have been created for children and young people. There are plenty of ideas, materials, and resources available for you to draw on.

11) *In Your Own Community:* You will of course know about other factors that modify or supplement the ideas expressed here. The pamphlet should, then, be used for general guidelines and as a stimulus to your own thinking, not as the final word on fire education for children.

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